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AUTHOR Kerzner, Randi L.
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the educational value of retaining low achieving elementary school students in the same grade for an additional year. Subjects were 56 students who had completed at least one grade level beyond the grade in which they had been retained. The students had each been tested with the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills during the year of retention and during the following year. Results showed that retention was beneficial academically to students in all grades, but that retaining a child in grades one, two, or three was more beneficial than later retention. (FL)

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THE EFFECT OF RETENTION ON ACHIEVEMENT

by

Randi L. Kerzner

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Masters of Arts in Reading Specialization at Kean College of New Jersey. May, 1982

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Is elementary retention (non-promotion) beneficial to the individual student academically? Does it result in significant academic achievement?

Louise Bates Ames (1981) reported in 'Retention in Grade Can Be A Step Forward" that non-promotion is usually not accompanied by emotional or social difficulties, and tends to result in improved grades. Psychologist Verne Lewis questioned over 400 parents of children who had repeated a grade. Eighty-seven percent felt that the good effects of retention definitely out-weighed the bad. Ninety percent believed that retention was justified. Eighty-nine percent said they never regretted their move, and eighty-eight percent said they would make the same decision again. Joan Ames Chase conducted a study in which she determined that 75% of the 65 children of first, second, and third grader students had no emotional upset and only 16 percent had temporary upset. Ninety-five percent of the parents favored retention and claimed that the children liked school better and felt more confident.

Students in The Greensville County (Virginia) school system were promoted on the basis if criteria other than achievement and therefore ranked in the thirtieth percentile. In the fall of 1973, they started a program of achievement-based promotion. Some students were more than one grade level behind the grade to which they had been assigned. Out of 3,750 students, 800 were retained. Samuel Owen and Deborah Ranick (1977), who studied this population said that "No students would be promoted until they showed, on the

achievement tests, their mastery of the skills for their grades." Their whole curriculum was changed and to evaluate pupil progress they adopted the following testing program - SRA Achievement Tests (grades 1-9), Iowa Tests of Educational Development (grades 10-12), and Metropolitan Readiness Test (Kindergarten).

The Greensville Program had success in this achievement-based promotion program. The number of students retained in grade has been falling. Achievement test scores have risen. Students who were scoring in the bottom 20-30% in the nation three years ago now score in the top 50-60%. Students show a positive attitude toward testing. Measured I.Q.'s have risen. The dropout rate has fallen. The goal of this program was to enable each child to have the best possible education and to have a diploma that stands for solid achievement. Owen and Ranick are happy with the success of the program.

Clair Koons (1977) disagrees with "The Greensville Program". She claimed that nonpromoted children do not progress as far as do their regularly promoted counerparts. Passing children to the next grade when they lack requisite skills does not deny them opportunities to learn, if the school will provide for individual differences within the classrooms.

This study questions why the results differ so much. Koons makes her own suggestions. When anything different occurs, good results are usually produced. When fear of being retained is in one's mind, students achieve more accord-

ing to the study by Gerald Kowitz and C.M. Armstrong (1961). More motivation was given to the tests that made students apply themselves more diligently to the testing situation. Lastly, teachers were asked to account for differences between their assessment of the students' achievement, and that indicated by standardized test scores. This may have prompted teachers to teach to the tests.

Koons concluded by stating regularly promoted low-achieving children score higher on achievement tests than do similar retained students after they spend an additional year in a grade. Some students regress following non-promotion. There is no criterion to predict which children may possibly benefit

Wadi Haddad (1979) did a study that claims the educational dollar is poorly spent when a student repeats a grade. Those arguing for grade repetition assume that academic factors determine success and failure, achievement tests are reliable, that some skills are best taught at a particular level, and children placed at similar developmental levels are emotionally better off.

This research argues for automatic promotion. It claims grade retention decreases the achievement and affects the students self-concepts. The author suggests a nongraded curriculum, ability group and a new role for educational measurement to solve the educational and economic problems of the schools.

Nancy Baenen and others (1980) wrote a research summary to present findings and restate policy conclusions as to

whether grade retention of promotion is more beneficial for students with serious academic problems. They claimes that research to date does not provide a conclusive answer to this issue; That serious methodological problems prohibit all but tentative conclusions, and that more quality research on the topic is needed.

William Bocks (1977) wrote an article that cited many different studies. The studies indicated that the practice of non-promotion is not effective as a device to ensure greater mastery of elementary school subjects. There are many harmful consequences of non-promotion, little difference is shown in the upper grades in dealing with a wider range of abilities when every student is promoted and the threat of non-promotion is not a motivating force. The research suggests that children can grow even better in classes with their own age-mates. Individualized programs and trained teachers are much better and more helpful than non-promotion.

Hypothesis

Since numerous viewpoints exist on the educational value of retention, this study was undertaken to reveal possible benefits and achievements of those students retained in any given elementary grade. It was hypothesized that there was no significant academic achievement for the individual student who was not promoted to the next grade in a given year. Does non-promotion actually solve a students' academic problem such as poor reading skills, or does it accelerate the rate of retardation in learning?

Definitions

Retention is also referred to repeating, flunking, non-promotion, "a year to grow". It is defined as a child who is compelled to repeat an entire school year in the same grade giving the child an added chance for classroom success. Academic achievement is scholastic success shown by the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills Tests. These standardized tests are based on a sufficiently large population and is proven reliable and valid.

Limitations

It is assumed that all students in this study have been retained because of academic reasons. Traits associated with the retained child are items such as low confidence, poor language development, inadequate skill foundation, immaturities, and/or non English speaking.

The study is limited by several factors. The number of participants for the study who have been retained and are still in the system. Incomplete records of students who have been retained, but have come from a different district. Enough follow up information of student after he/she has been retained. Support from principals and Board of Education to carry out the study. The effects of different teachers and schools. This study is limited to determining the effect of non-promotion as measured by standardized tests. The amount of time allotted to this study limits the best possible results.

Procedure

A survey technique was used to get records of children who had been retained at the primary and intermediate levels. To be included in the study, the students must have completed at least one grade level beyond the grade at which he/she has been retained. He/she must have been tested, with the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills during the year and possibily one additional year. Differences in scores were charted. The t test was used to determine the significance of mean differences for the sample for each year of testing.

Results

Table I presents the results of the means, standard diviations, and the t test of the pre and post test achievements of the pupils in grades one through five who had been retained once during their school years.

The mean level of grade one pre-test was 31.5 and the post-test was 66.11 which shows a 34.61 gain. This mean difference yielded a t of 6.33 which was found to be significant below the .01 level of confidence.

Grade two pre-test mean was 31.36 with a difference of 21.00 from the 52.64 post-test mean. The t of 3.20 was found to be significant below the .01 level of confidence.

The mean level of grade three pre-test was 15.22 and the post-test was 30.11 which shows a 14.89 gain. This mean difference yielded a t of 2.17 which was found to be significant below the .01 level of confidence.

Grade four pre-test was 28.5 with a difference of 15.25

TABLE I

Table I shows the mean, standard diviation, and the t test of Pre-test of the year of retention and Post-test results following year of retention from grades one through five.

Group retained	Mean	Standard Diviation	t test	Level of Significance
Grade 1 N=18				
Pre-test	31.5	14.57	6.33	$<.01$
Post-test	66.11	16.45		
Grade 2 N=14				
Pre-test	31.36	15.31	3.20	$<.01$
Post-test	52.64	18.52		
Grade 3 N=9	.	.		
Pre-test	15.22	13.47	2.17	$<.05$
Post-test	30.11	14.01		
Grade 4 N=4				
Pre-test	28.5	20.75	1.04	N.S.
Post-test	43.75	14.62		
Grade 5 N=11				
Pre-test	28.5	20.75	2.06	N.S.
Post-test	38.27	19.06		

from the 52.64 post-test mean. The t of 1.04 showed no significant mean gain. Grade five pre-test was 23.36 and the post-test was 38.27 which shows a 14.91 gain. Both grades four and five did not show a significant gain, although grade five was approaching significance at the .05 level. A small number of retentions can account for the

results. A larger number of degress of freedom may show that gains made were statistically significant since mean gains were sizable.

Grades six and seven were not included because there was not a large enough population to make an accurate generalization.

Table II shows the mean difference between the year of retention and the years that followed. The t test result

Table II

Table II shows the mean of the year retained and years following retention, mean difference and t test.

Group retained	Year of Retention	One year later	Two years later	Three years later	Four years
Grade 1	31.5	66.11	55.10	53.40	
		MD +34.61	MD -11.01	MD -1.70	
	t=3.20 significance $<.01$				
Grade 2	31.36	52.64	47.58	55.13	62.67
		MD +21.28	MD -5.06	MD +7.55	MD +7.54
	t=8.75 significance $<.01$				
Grade 3	15.22	30.11	39.75	31.40	
		MD +14.89	MD +9.64	MD -8.35	
	t=1.42 N S				
Grade 4	28.5	43.75	38.67		
		MD +15.25	MD -5.08		
	t=1.16 N S				
Grade 5	23.36	38.27	61.67	54.33	
		MD +14.91	MD +23.40	MD -7.34	
	t=8.39 significance $<.01$				

shows the significance between the means of the pre-test and the test results from the last year the student took the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills.

Grade one yielded a t of 3.20 which found to be significant below the .ol level of confidence. Grade two

showed a t of 8.75 which was found to be significant below the .01 level of confidence. In grade one the mean difference increased from the year of retention but decreased from the second year to the third year. The third year mean result decreased by 1.70 points to the fourth year. Grade two mean differences decreased from the second year to the third year but increased during the other years.

There was no significant gain at the third grade level although the mean score did increase. The mean difference increased the year after retention, but decreased the last year.

The results on the fourth grade sample showed an increase the year after retention, but a decrease the year after that. The t test did not show a significant gain . This may have been affected by the small number of retentions.

Grade five increased in mean scores two years after retention, but decreased the last year. This mean difference yielded a t of 8.39 which was found to be significant below the .01 level of confidence.

Conclusions

This study showed that elementary retention (non-promotion) is beneficial to the individual student academically. One more year in school helps the below average student. It is more benefical in the lower grades of one, two, and three. It appears, however, that at the fifth grade level, retention can still bring about significant gains , thus the hypothesis for the study was rejected.

Implications for education suggest that retention for the remedial or slower learner is the best choice. The child who is kept back in grades one, two, or three benefits the most. This study suggests that the earlier the child is retained, the better the changes are for success in school.

Using the results of this year's Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills, a follow-up of this study is suggested to see how the students have progressed. Also, a similar study is suggested to find out the results of retention in grades six, seven, and eight. At the time of this study, there was not enough data to establish adequate results for these levels.

Retention: Related Research

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being retained is in one's mind, students achieve more according to the study by Gerald Kowitz and C.M. Armstrong (1961). More motivation was given to the tests that made students apply themselves more diligently to the testing situation. Lastly, teachers were asked to account for differences between their assessment of students' achievement, and that indicated by standardized test scores. This may have prompted teachers to teach to the tests.

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Nonpromotion was used as a means to maintain standards, assure personal and social adjustment if the pupil, and develop motivation and respect for diligent work. It became an universal tool but one which has been highly inconsistently applied.

Keyes (1911) found that only 21 percent of nonpromoted students attained higher levels of achievement after repeating the grade. Another 39 percent showed no change, while 40

percent actually scored lower.

Chansky (1969) researcher the better risks as selected by teachers were moved ahead in first grade. Significant differences were found on vocabulary and reading scales of the California Achievement Test favoring those promoted following a year's work.

Walker (1973) cited many different reviews of research on nonpromotion in terms of achievement, self-concept, and attitudes toward school. Few nonpromoted students attain grade average in achievement at any time after their retention. A large number actually perform at lower levels after the experience. Nonpromoted students are more likely to repeat the experience at any later period of schooling than normal-progress students. As students continue to lag behind grade peers, multiple retention further complicates the situation. The self-concept is lower of the nonpromotee than that of normal progress students. The retainee is viewed by both peers and teachers as more aggressive. Research has failed to relate level of achievement and attitude toward school. He said a need exists for a multidimensional framework to establish the extent to which programs adhere to the theoretical continuous progress model. More attention ahould be given to long term learning of graded and nongraded programs rather than to short-term gains. Walker concludes that non-graded, continuous progress plans may deal effectively with both the learning and emotional problems of slow learners.

Caplan and Kinsbourne (1973) did a study on a group of

elementary school students, who were repeating the current grade. When their report card marks for behavior were compared, the girl repeaters had significantly more disruptive classroom conduct than the promoted girls. The two groups of boys did not differ in conduct. Two possible explanations were given for their findings. Either some girls who do very poorly in school respond by becoming markedly disruptive, or when a girl is achieving at a marginal level and also behaves disruptively, the fact that she is a girl makes her disruptive behavior more conspicious and disrupting to the teacher. Teachers appear to decide whether or not to promote girls partly on the basis of their behavior and not just their achievement.

A review of the literature by Reiter (1973) in 1965 revealed considerable research into automatic promotion for all pupils and rigid retention-in-grade for those whose achievement was judged deficient. Promotion appeared to have fewer disadvantages than retention. Pupils who repeated grades tended to become discouraged by their obvious failure and to be no better off at the end of their schooling than if they had been promoted each year, with their classmates. Studies since 1965 have suggested that for maximal learning to take place, the crucial issue is how the individual pupil is treated in his school - rather than the adoption of one policy or another. They call for human treatment of each pupil as a person of value and creative provision of appropriate learning tasks in which the individual pupil can

experience success.

Kamii and Weikart (1963) did a study to find if the marks, achievement levels, and intelligence test scores of seventh graders who were retained once in elementary school were up to the level of regularly promoted ones. The study showed the pupils who were retained once were found to have several characteristics. Their marks in academic subjects were below the average of the regularly promoted seventh graders, usually D's and F's. As far as marks in academic subjects are concerned, giving pupils an extra year in elementary school does not seem to make them come up to the level of the regularly promoted pupils whose chronological ages average a year younger. Their achievement levels in reading and arithmetic were significantly lower than those of the regularly promoted pupils. The t-test was used to determine whether or not the retained group and the normal group could be considered to have come from the same population. It was concluded with respect to achievement in reading and arithmetic that the retained sample who were given an additional year could not be considered to have come from the same population as the normal pupils. More than half of the retained students had average I.Q.'s as measured by the California Test of Mental Maturity. The I.Q.'s did not explain the poor marks earned by the retained group. Evidence indicated by the Kamii and Weikart study indicated that retention does not help in the long run.

Goodland (1952) stated that undesirable growth character

istics and unsatisfactory school progress are associated with nonpromoted children rather than with promoted slow-learning children. Slow-learning children who have been promoted tend to make more satisfactory progress and adjustment than do their peers who have been retained. Research concludes according to Goodland that not all differences identified favor the promoted groups. The promotion policies are not justified by evidence, but it does support promotion over nonpromotion as the more defensible educational practice.

Dobbs and Neville (1967) designed a study to ascertain the effects of nonpromotion on the achievement of once-retained first graders as compared with never-retained second graders. From these two groups, pairs were matched on seven variables- race, sex, socio-economic level, type of classroom assignment, age, mental ability and reading achievement. A t-test for matched pairs was used to test the significance if the mean difference between the 1962 and the 1963 reading and arithmetic achievement test scores of the nonpromoted and promoted groups. Both reading achievement gain and arithmetic gain of the promoted group was found to be significantly greater than that of the nonpromoted group. Results indicated that nonpromotion was actually a disadvantage to achievement.

Abidin, Golladay and Howerton (1971) examined the long and short term correlations of first and second grade retention in relation to the variables of achievement and intelligence over a six year period. The retained and

promoted control group were also compared in terms of relevant demographic variables - sex, race, initial intelligence, socioeconomic level of family, father absent, etc. Results reveal that certain nonacademic variables are significantly related to whether a child will be retained during the first two years of schooling. The demographic data suggest that the parents of retention candidates are an important variable. The data suggest that there is no evidence of any positive or negative short term effect of retention. The long term effect is not so benign. Retained children display a continuing deterioration in achievement and intelligence through the sixth grade.

The editor of American School Board Journal (1974) asked the question - Is it better to promote the unlearning student or to hold him back, hoping his learning will be better the second time around? The New York City schools no longer promote students who are one year below grade level. The students who are held back under New York's revised promotion guidelines will be given individually prescribed programs to meet their personal needs. A student who already has been retained but still is behind in reading will be transferred to the next grade level and will continue to receive special assistance. The editor stated that New York's new emphasis on reading standards is not welcomed and should spread quickly and widely.

Woodruff (1980) reported a study of 8th graders investigating the effects of Kindergarten attendance on

Basic Skills Test (BST) performance and the incidence of grade retention. The results from the BST demonstrated that achievement of pupils with kindergarten background was superior to that of non-kindergarten pupils on mathmatics, spelling, language and reading. The effect was greatest for mathematics and language and less for reading and spelling. Results from the study of mathematics achievement revealed that retention in grade is less for pupils with kindergarten experience than pupils without it.

Hagen (1980) teaches fourth grade in Denver. She recommended ten students out of 27 fourth grade students to be retained at the end of tthe year. Eight of those were officially retained. Short term data was available. The four students retained because of language difficulties became "good, solid, average students". The girl retained because of academic problems caused for her by her family's having moved frequently moved before school began again. The three boys who were behind because they refused to complete assignments did not become model students but did complete work and all their report card grades were C's or better.

Jackson (1975) states that educators who favor the use of grade retention usually claim that it serves two major purposes: to remedy inadequate academic progress and to aid in the development of students who are judged to be emotionally immature. The rationale is that students who have not adequately mastered the material at the grade level

will not be equipped to profit from the material at the next higher level and should not be promoted. It is presumed that such students will be in a better position to develop if they are retained a year and placed in a class where responsibilities coincide with their level of maturity. (Scott and Ames, 1969).

Cunningham and Owens (1976) contend that educators must devise new educational systems. Education is based on the belief that time invested by the student in the learning situation will result in definite and definable achievement.

Stringer (1960) reported that about 40 out of 50 cases of nonpromotion, the parents were either unable or unwilling to make an effort in the child's behavior. Examination of 41 social promotions revealed that all but three had parents who went to the school and opposed retention. These parents accepted the responsibility for the outcome of social promotion. She concluded social promotion comes to those with school-interested parents. Retention would not be possible in the first grade and the best bets for retention would be those middle or upper class children with assertive parents who force social promotions out of the school to protect their own pride.

Safer, Heaton, and Allen (1977) did a study which dealt with variations in the cumulative rate of elementary school nonpromotion in three economically different areas of a suburban county for 1964 and 1972. The age of students on completion of sixth grade was used as a measure of the number of students retained.

Major finding of the study showed the average frequency of nonpromotion in elementary schools of an affluent county ran three times greater in the blue collar area than it did in the white collar area. Multi-retention was even greater. Associated with economic differences between the areas were primarily educational differences. The explanation for the high rate of nonpromotion for children in the country's low economic section is that these students achieve nearly a year below the country norm.

Lunden (1979) cited a study conducted in a city in Tennessee. It concerned the decision-making process of the elementary school principal relative to nonpromotion. The study concluded principals are not behaving irrationally by condoning the practice of nonpromotion. Principals and teachers lack the research knowledge to properly analyze their retention/promotion decision. Terminology is seen as a major problem in the decision process. It is concluded that terms such as 'slow' and 'immature' should have definite precise definitions which are accepted by educators and layman. Principals are influenced by the teachers, parents, the community, the superintendent and the Board of Education. Finally, parents are extremely influential in determing the final outcome of the retention/promotion decision, and are generally opposed to nonpromotion.

Finlayson (1977) did a study of the effect of non-promotion upon the self-concept of pupils in primary grades. After nonpromotion of first grade level the nonpromoted

group of pupils continued to increase their self-concept scores significantly, which while scores of the borderline and promoted groups dropped slightly, but not significantly during the second year of the study. Finlayson concluded that the nonpromotion decision in schools may be a valid option for back-to the basics, however it does not appear to be a practice that negatively influences self-concept.

Sandoval reported on Light's retention Scale. It was completed for 123 candidates to repeat the first grade. These same first-grade children were tested with a number of measures of maturity, including achievement tests, measures of intellectual functioning, visual-motor integration, self-concept, and physical maturity. Results indicated that Light's total score is not sufficiently reliable and has little concurrent validity for making retention decisions.

Lieberman (1980) cited a rational decision making model on the part of school personnel and parents with regard to retention. Child factors include physical disabilities, physical size, academic potential, psychosocial maturity, child's self-concept, ability to function independently, grade placement, peer pressure, sex absenteeism, age, basic skill competencies, previous retentions, and attitude toward retention. Family factors include geographical moves, foreign language, emigrants, attitude toward retention, age of siblings and sibling pressure, and involvement of family physician. School factors include school system attitudes toward retention, principal and teacher attitude toward retention.

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APPENDIX

STUDENT NUMBER	CTBS-YEAR OF RETENTION	CTBS-ONE YEAR LATER	CTBS-TWO YEARS LATER	CTBS-THREE YEARS LATER
1.	16	63	49	49
2.	46	86	43	40
3.	26	66	61	81
4.	6	66	72	66
5.	7	46	37	31
6.	35	52	22	
7.	42	77	92	
8.	51	61	49	
9.	47	70	65	
10.	36	83	61	
11.	45	59		
12.	35	92		
13.	35	80		
14.	52	68		
15.	6	50		
16.	29	56		
17.	27	89		
18.	26	26		
19.	40	61	51	
20.	39	65	67	
21.	18	65	70	
22.	39	72		
23.	54	76		
24.	44	29		
25.	22	54		
26.	8	40		
27.	44	72		
28.	13	46		
29.	45	55		
30.	47	31		
31.	11	10		
32.	15	61		
33.	3	32	20	18
34.	5	14	22	33
35.	7	14	37	31
36.	7	22	54	47
37.	16	37	19	28
38.	37	59	79	
39.	5	44	44	
40.	41	29	43	
41.	16	20		
42.	23	25	41	
43.	59	43	65	
44.	1	41	10	
45.	31	66		
46.	46	72	77	74
47.	26	54	45	37
48.	36	56	63	52

STUDENT NUMBER	CTBS-YEAR OF RETENTION	CTBS-ONE YEAR LATER	CTBS-TWO YEARS LATER	CTBS-THREE YEARS LATER
49.	30	39		
50.	12	28		
51.	15	37		
52.	37	58		
53.	7	14		
54.	18	35		
55.	4	11		
56.	26	17		